Research Article

Is the Failed State Thesis Analytically Useful? The Case of Yemen

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The failed state thesis has been a matter for discussion in the international relations academy for more than two decades. However, the soundness of this analytic framework has been questioned. This article critically engages this debate by examining the ability of the thesis to provide insight into the practice of statecraft in the case of Yemen. It argues that as a result of its rigid and Eurocentric approach, the failed state thesis is unable to recognise the strategies employed by states like Yemen to ensure their survival, which include the purposeful production of chaos.

Keywords: failed state; Yemen; chaos; crisis

Introduction

The failed state thesis has been a matter for discussion in the international relations academy for more than two decades. Furthermore, its terminology has transcended the academy, entering public discourse. Thus, it is used widely by policymakers as a discursive and analytical tool to provide insight into cases of 'failed states'. For example, Yemen is often referred to as a failing state in public discourses. Moreover, academic discussion has followed suit (Boucek and Ottaway, 2010). However, the soundness of the failed state thesis is questioned since the merits of analyses generated from it have come under attack from several quarters. This article critically engages this debate by examining the ability of the thesis to provide analytical insight into the practice of statecraft in the case of the Yemeni state. It illustrates that the thesis, due to its Eurocentric[1] biases, is unable to provide insight into the mechanisms that sustain Yemen's 'shadow government': a combination of tribal and patronage systems. This lack of insight is due to a focus on what states like Yemen lack in comparison to an idealised conception of the 'Western'/European state. Thus, in the case of Yemen it leads to the employment of orientalist[2] simplifications that mystify the complex, interrelated web of tribal governance and patronage. It also does not recognise the strategies employed by ex-President Saleh's regime and other strongmen who purposefully manufacture crisis and chaos (Blumi, 2011; Philips, 2011) to ensure their enrichment and survival. Thus, the Yemeni case indicates that states use the production of chaos (Blumi, 2011) to secure international funding, an ironic process given that funds are often provided in order to avoid state failure. This practice is similar to the way in which Yemen in the past has used attempts to simulate statehood for the same purpose. This strategy ensures that the Yemeni regime secures enough funding to keep its power structures functional, to the detriment of the majority of the population.

The failed state thesis

The concept of the 'failed state' was developed when the use of the state as a universal independent variable was no longer possible due to the problematic nature of some ex-colonial states. Robert Jackson (1993, p. 1) sought to 'investigate the international normative framework that upholds sovereign statehood in the Third World'. He argued that what he called Third World states gained *de jure* sovereignty due to exogenous factors while they lacked internal *de facto* legitimacy. Hence, Jackson termed the sovereignty of these states 'negative sovereignty'. The level of analysis Jackson employed 'is not the state, but the state-system' because, he argued, quasi-states are a product of changes in the rules of the international system, deliberately made to replace the institutions of colonialism (Jackson, 1993, p. 26). Therefore, although his analysis of the international norms that have enabled 'quasi-statehood' remains insightful and a necessary addition to the literature of institutionalism, when it comes to the internal functions of these states, he presents a simplified image.

In his work Jackson (1987, p. 527) reverts to well-known Eurocentric trope of primordialism,[3] implying not only inferiority but an inability to change, to describe the nature of quasi-states. In his analysis of quasi-states in Africa he also alludes to systems of neo-patrimonialism when he argues that 'statehood in Africa ... [is] almost exclusively ... an exploitable treasure trove devoid of moral value' (Jackson, 1987, p. 527). The problem with these two arguments is that they do not help one understand the institutions of neo-patrimonialism or other institutions like tribalism while on the other hand judging them severely by berating their inferior and amoral nature. This analysis could, if applied to a state like Yemen, take orientalist hues, suggesting the inferior, amoral and unchangeable nature of 'Other' societies. Such an argument is made by Roby Barrett who argues for the eternal nature of Yemeni politics, stating: 'In Yemen the more things change, the more they stay the same' (Barrett, 2011, p. 73). However, anthropologist Kanhong Lin suggests that images of, for example, 'close-minded tribesmen' conjured up in the media discourse of Yemen as a failed state and, it is argued here, in Barrett's analysis, are 'fundamentally misguided' (Lin, 2010, p. 28). Furthermore, the work of Sheila Carapico (1998) on civil society in Yemen also serves to reveal the misguided nature of arguments about the unchangeable nature of these states' societies. The works of anthropologists like Carapico and Lin serve to illustrate that the characterisations used to describe quasi-states in Jackson's work can serve, if applied, to propagate orientalist myths about these states and their societal structures. Furthermore, it is argued that the assumptions present in Jackson's analysis about the internal, amoral structures of quasi-states are not particularly conducive to an understanding of the complex systems and strategies that preserve these states' power structures.

On the other hand, for William Zartman (1995, p. 5) a state has failed and lacks sovereignty 'when the basic functions of the state [the provision of security, infrastructure, the rule of law, etc.] are no longer performed'. His definition is the result of inductive analysis and his work is geared towards the formation of policy-relevant conclusions. This view of state failure is also espoused by Robert Rotberg (2003, pp. 1–2 and 2004) who argues that states fail 'because they cannot provide positive political goods to their people' (Rotberg, 2002, p. 85). Some of the positive political goods he identifies are security, education, health, economic opportunity, environmental surveillance and a legal and judicial framework (Rotberg, 2002, p. 85). His work is geared towards inductively establishing clear criteria for state failure. The most important such criterion is the enduring character of violence directed against the existing

government and the relentless character of demands for shared power or autonomy (Rotberg, 2002, p. 86). Through his work Rotberg seeks to analyse state weakness and find the reasons why some weak states collapse while others do not.

The questions the three theorists seek to address presuppose the existence of an ideal 'state' paradigm, clearly inspired by the European state experience, which, taken as a benchmark, can generate a checklist for state failure and its causes. Therefore, Jackson (1987 and 1993) seeks the international framework that contributes to the production of quasi states, while Rotberg (2002, 2003 and 2004) and Zartman (1995) seek to establish a checklist of what a failed state is. The framework created through their research is relatively rigid, as it is derived from their Eurocentric conception of the ideal state. In the cases of Rotberg (2002, 2003 and 2004) and Zartman (1995), this 'ideal' state can provide positive political goods mentioned above, though it is questionable whether any state can satisfy all of the conditions on their checklists. On the other hand, in Jackson's case the ideal state enjoys empirical, positive sovereignty, meaning that it is not exempt from the mechanisms of the international balance of power due to international courtesy or disinterest (Jackson, 1987, p. 528 and 1993, p. 23). However, his approach regarding the internal make-up of these states is not as broad as Rotberg's and Zartman's recognition that empirical differences between states have always been a feature of the international system.

The analytical frameworks created by the three theorists have been adopted to analyse *and* provide policy solutions – in the cases of Rotberg and Zartman – for states like Yemen. This article argues that Jackson's focus on uncovering the international framework for the production of these states leads him to oversimplify their internal characteristics. He thus reverts to sound bites – for example, describing the system of quasi-states as 'primordial' – which limit instead of expand his work's analytical utility. Similarly, Rotberg's and Zartman's specific framework of analysis prevents them from providing analytical insight into how weak states function. This oversight is rooted in their concept of an ideal state based on the European experience. Their Eurocentrism then leads to the production of a rigid checklist for defining statehood. As a result, their subsequent purposeful engagement with policymaking is also similarly Eurocentric and rigid since it is unable to discern any local conditions and different local socio-political associations that are not found in the 'West'. Thus it is argued here that the failed states thesis's inability to engage analytically cases such as that of Yemen mystifies the processes and strategies that preserve these states' power structures.

In ' "State Failure" in Theory and Practice', Stein Sundstol Eriksen directly engages with the analytical capacity of the thesis, while retaining an awareness of its presuppositions. Eriksen (2011, p. 233) argues that the proponents of the failed state thesis indicate 'that any deviations from their respective definitions of statehood can only appear as a lack'. Thus, these states appear as a deviation of the Western form. Post-colonial theorists have also focused on these presuppositions. Roxanne Lynn Doty (1996, p. 162) argues that texts like Jackson's, Rotberg's and Zartman's 'attest to the power of earlier representations' of 'us' and 'them'. Further, they are premised on 'the presupposition of a clear unambiguous boundary ... between the North and the South, between "real states" and "quasi states" '. While Doty engages the failed state thesis's Eurocentric presuppositions, she does not engage its analytical usefulness. Eriksen transcends normative arguments against the failed state thesis. Instead he argues that the state should be treated as a category of practice but not one of analysis. His critique is supported by the arguments of Rosa Brooks (2005) who argues that the state, while not defunct, should not be fetishised. Therefore, when some states become defunct they will

not be artificially supported. Instead, other forms of social association emerge as options. Thus, from two different perspectives, Brooks and Eriksen recognise that in practice states and, more broadly, social and political associations, differ. The case of Yemen is a potent illustration of the merits of this argument.

The Republic of Yemen: shifting alliances and great crises

The Republic of Yemen (ROY) came into being on 22 May 1990 when the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), the only Marxist state in Arabia, agreed to unify. According to Robert Burrowes (1991), unification was a means of domesticating the question of access to, and sharing of, new-found oil resources. The process of coming to an acceptable agreement regarding their exploitation created a stepping stone towards unification. Furthermore, unification was the result of the changing geopolitical environment which left the PDRY with few allies and no source of income following the weakening and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. These broader geopolitical changes also occurred at a time when the PDRY leadership was weakened and without much legitimacy following the 1986 civil war and subsequent defection of 3,000 party operatives to the YAR. The weakening of the PDRY led to an eventual official de-emphasis of the existential threat the two states posed to each other due to their different political systems, proximity and claims to represent the whole of the Yemeni nation. The weakening of the PDRY also provided a political opportunity for Saleh and his General Congress party (GCP) in the YAR to consolidate power through unification, given that his organisation was in a far better position than the PDRY's ruling Yemeni Socialist party (YSP).

Thus, the union was entered into after consultation between the elites of the two states but with the public excluded. Yet, unification was received with jubilation from crowds on both sides, but with much mistrust on the part of elites. The new constitution provided for a unitary state which, on paper, was to take the form of a presidential democracy. The president is elected for a seven-year term, the legislature is bicameral and the judiciary is independent. Furthermore, the new constitution allowed civil society to flourish (Carapico, 1998). However, the state did not move to merge and develop institutions that would reflect both unification and democratisation. The respective armies of the YAR and PDRY continued to exist after unification while no moves were made to integrate them. Furthermore, all the institutions of the new state were in Sana'a, leaving those employed by the former PDRY's civil service in a disadvantaged position. Additionally, whereas the wages of those previously working for the PDRY government remained the same, the stronger economy of the YAR meant that prices went up.

Civil war eventually broke out in 1994 as a result both of the discomfort at home and the political machinations of domestic and foreign elites. In many ways, it can be argued that the conflict was delayed by three years due to the Gulf War of 1991 during which Yemen was a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Instead of agreeing to a UN-backed intervention, Yemen insisted on calling for an Arab solution to the crisis. As a result, the US cut almost all aid to the country and the Saudis expelled over a million Yemeni workers. This caused Yemenis to band together as unemployment rose from 4 to 23 per cent in less than five years (Stevenson, 1993). The civil war of 1994 was won by the former North in part due to the alliance created between Saleh and Abdul Majeed al-Zindani's Afghan Arabs (Al-Jifri, 1997).

Zindani, an academic, politician and leader of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood, is a member of the complex and diverse Islah party. He was a known associate of Osama bin Laden who sent men to fight in the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. During the civil war, he recruited the returnees from Afghanistan to fight the YSP. After the North's victory, the expectation was that since North Yemen emerged supreme and the South was eliminated as a power centre, the state would now move towards greater integration. However this was not the case and Northern elites continued their repression of the South. Furthermore, the government cracked down on civil society opposition. Democracy was jeopardised as the legislature and the judiciary's independence became nominal. Instead the whole territory was administered through neo-patrimonial patronage networks, the same networks that had ensured the survival of the YAR regime since 1978.

In part as a result of the civil war, a secessionist movement appeared in the South headed by ex-PDRY army officers whose pensions had been withheld. The movement was also a response to the Northern elites' use of the South as an arena where their rivalries could be diffused through the acquisition of land. The movement grew and its calls for secession present the biggest problem for the regime in Sana'a, since they threaten the territorial integrity of the state. It is also problematic for Yemen's international allies because South Yemen has become the home of a resurgent al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In addition, the Gulf of Aden is among the world's most pirated waters with people, arms and drugs being trafficked in and out of Yemen.

Yemen's association with international terrorism is not a new development. It started in earnest in 2000 when the USS *Cole* was struck outside the Gulf of Aden. The attack resulted in the deaths of 17 sailors while injuring 39. Since Christmas Day 2009, when the Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab targeted North West flight 253, America's counter-terrorism machine has been turned against the militants who are said to be dominant in the Abyan governorate in Yemen. Counter-terrorism has primarily focused on using drone strikes to eliminate high-value targets. In May 2012 a second underwear bomb attempt was foiled by the US intelligence services, highlighting both the strength of the intelligence services and the boldness of the AQAP.

Another substantial challenge is posed by the al-Huthi conflict. It started in Sa'ada in September 2004 and has had six different phases. It is testament to the Yemeni regime's lack of a monopoly over the means of violence. The origins of the conflict and its characteristics are debated in the literature and one could say that there are two distinct schools of thought, each providing a different approach to the failed state thesis. The first one takes an essentialist view of the conflict, referring almost exclusively to tribalism and sectarianism as root causes. Tribalism and sectarianism are conditions that Rotberg (2003 and 2004) argues are usually present in weak and failing states. On the other hand, in *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon*, the authors claim that 'it is a conflict in which local material discontent and Zaydi identity claims have intersected with the state methods of rule and self-legitimation' (Salmoni, Loidolt and Wells, 2010, p. xv). Furthermore, Isa Blumi (2011, p. 42) claims that the conflict stems from issues over the management of seasonal trade routes which determine the political and economic fortunes of the local population. He argues that these routes have been determined by the porosity of the Saudi–Yemeni border. Thus, Blumi (2011, p. 105) states that:

> 'as a result of Saudi efforts to formalize the boundary with walls, fences and security posts ... [people] once able to travel freely across their lands, for example, have been forced to

obtain visas to pass through newly erected fenced areas that constitute an extension of their farm land'.

These two works include sectarianism in their attempts to provide an understanding of the issues that fuel the civil war; however, they also demystify the conflict by addressing questions related to the practice of statecraft as this is experienced on the ground.

A report of the International Crisis Group into the conflict has brought to the forefront another driving force of the war: the battle for succession between Saleh and his son Ahmed on the one hand and Major-General Ali Muhsin Al-Ahmar, commander of the first armoured battalion who is responsible for the war in Sa'ada, on the other. Reports are conflicting. There have been indications that Ali Muhsin has used Islamist militias to strengthen himself during the war. In contrast, other reports stress that Saleh has used the war to undermine his popular commander (ICG, 2009, p. 15). These reports indicate the multifaceted nature of the conflict in Sa'ada which cannot be understood solely with reference to sectarianism and tribalism.

The last major event in Yemen's modern history is the beginning of the popular Arab Spring revolution in February 2011. The youth revolution demanded an overhaul of the current neo-patrimonial political system and it has given rise to several grass-roots organisations. Out of this movement, new figures like Tawakkol Karman, the Nobel Prize winner, have emerged. At the same time the regime's strongmen who opposed Saleh found this to be the most opportune moment to challenge his primacy. Thus, while members of the youth opposition were in Sana'a's Tahrir Square, Saleh's regime was engaged in a stand-off with Ali Muhsin and the family in charge of Yemen's biggest tribal confederation, the Al Ahmars. The new sheikh, after the death of the family's previous patriarch Abdullah – who was head of Islah and a Saleh ally – chose to oppose Saleh openly when he was most vulnerable. Thus the two strongmen, Ali Muhsin and Sheikh Saqib Al Ahmar, formed an alliance in order to challenge Saleh's primacy over the state's patronage network by claiming to be supporting the uprising, thus increasing their own legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. In November last year President Saleh signed the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) deal which gave him immunity for all crimes in exchange for him leaving power and establishing an interim government that would restructure the army and draft a new constitution to be ratified by 2014. The uprising and the military stand-off that took place, in parallel, appear to be the ultimate attack on the state's legitimacy and they heightened fears over Yemen's impending failure. The signature of the deal was followed by an election with only one candidate, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Al Hadi, who had previously served as vice-president under Saleh. The uncontested ascension of a former elite strongman to the presidency has created the impression that the GCC deal may have brought about a change in faces and names, but not in substance. However, the jury is still out regarding Al Hadi's intentions, his ability to merge the fractured army and to rid the Yemeni state of the old guard comprised by Saleh's family.

One should not be too hasty in asserting that the causes of these challenges lie in the inability of the regime to control its territory. Interviews the author conducted with activists who participated in the recent uprising indicate that Yemen's former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, allowed the extremist militants, who mostly come from outside Yemen, to take over territories since terrorism had proven to be a profitable enterprise for him in the past. Requests for assistance with counter-terrorism provided him with the opportunity to be seen as a reliable ally in the US, a subterfuge that arguably saved him from the fate of Hosni Mubarak and Colonel Gaddafi. Further, it ensured a steady stream of dollars into defunct government institutions which in reality end up in the pockets of the elites. As Blumi (2011, p. 143)

argues, the 'regime has gravitated towards violence as a means of monopolizing the strategic imperatives that the resulting chaos creates within circles of global power'. This chaos gave Saleh a free hand to deal with challenges to his reign such as the al-Huthi conflict (Blumi, 2011; Philips, 2011).

Furthermore, an analysis of Yemen's recent history through the prism of the failed state thesis cannot sufficiently examine the multifaceted political environment that has produced the above challenges. It would only focus on the security and humanitarian challenges, arguing that a lack of legitimacy and the all but defunct state institutions are the root cause of Yemen's dissent into chaos. However, these institutions never existed in Yemen in the ways that the failed state thesis assumes. Thus, indicating their absence does not provide one with analytical insight into the structure of the Yemeni state and the strategies employed by the regime to ensure that key structures survive. Furthermore, focusing on institutional failures prevents one from seeing that the descent into chaos, according to Blumi and Philips, has been both an effect of the regime's structure and an intentional strategy for the survival and enrichment of elites. The inability to provide analytical insight into the informal structures and strategies that ensure the regime's survival brings into question all suggestions for the stabilisation of the Yemeni state stemming from the logic of the failed state thesis. The article will now discuss Yemen's shadow government in order to explain and analyse better the ever-changing fluid character of the system and the specific practices of statecraft employed by the Yemeni state.

Yemen's shadow government: tribalism and the patronage network

Tribalism has become a fashionable term in the past year due to the importance of understanding its implications for the uprisings in Libya and Syria. However, as Blumi (2011, p. 14) argues, attitudes exist within policymaking groups today whereby 'any constituent group bureaucratically documented becomes the ubiquitous "tribe", which retroactively takes on primordial significance'. The Arabic word for tribe is *qabilah*. It '[refers] to economic, political and social groups who interact within certain territories' (Blumi, 2011, p. 23). Lisa Wedeen (2008, p. 171) states that 'in Yemen ... tribes often denote territorial political arrangements made up of [grain and *qāt*] farmers or ranchers living in villages'. These political organisations were historically 'responsible for [defence], keeping the peace, guaranteeing the sanctity of local markets, and either protecting or preventing the passage of [travellers]' (Carapico, 1998, p. 64). Furthermore, they were characterised by a code of conduct and they provided communities with dispute resolution mechanisms and protection during conflict (Dresch, 1993). Mechanisms also exist that allow tribesmen to switch from one tribe to another. Blumi (2011) argues that due to the prejudice that exists against tribalism we should switch from referring to tribes to referring to communities. However, Shelagh Weir (2007, p. 2) states that:

> 'the term *tribe* is still a useful portmanteau term, I believe, for territorial polities whose members share a common allegiance, which exists in a matrix of similar polities with which they have relations, and which have always been potentially or actually formally subordinate to some kind of "state", also, of course, a problematic term'.

Although not all Yemenis are tribal, the importance of understanding Yemen's tribal system lies in the fact that for many people it is the main or only administrative system they know. Therefore, for tribe members, the state's inability to reach tribal areas, especially in the highlands, and to provide security, infrastructure and services, fostered the feeling that the

state is not representative of the Yemeni nation to which they feel they belong (Manea, 1998). This lack of identification with the Yemeni state has fuelled conflicts such as the one in Sa'ada.

Core functions have at different times been fulfilled by tribes with the help of external revenues. According to Carapico the co-operatives formed in tribal areas in the YAR '[d]uring the 1970s ... expanded the intercity triangle of paved roads' (Carapico, 1998, p. 108) and '[t]hey introduced generators and water pumps to small towns and large villages, opened hundreds of primary schools, and literally outspent the government in delivering village and [neighbourhood] services' (Carapico, 1998, p. 109). This indicates that the tribal system could in fact be a candidate for a different form of political and social association that Brooks (2005) argued should be considered if the state becomes defunct. Beyond understanding the importance of the tribal system for the economic and social existence of citizens, one must not overlook that the tribes of Northern Yemen are heavily armed. This helps their political leaders to be prominently involved in formal politics in addition to their involvement in the patronage network (Philips, 2011).

Patronage network in the case of Yemen refers to the fluid but deeply entrenched web of tribally and regionally based patronage through which power and wealth is transmitted (Longley, 2010, p. 386). It includes mainly tribal and religious elites as well as wealthy merchants and technocrats, though their position is weaker. The basis of this network was former president Saleh who came to power when his predecessor was murdered in 1978. Saleh defied predictions when he remained in power for 33 years. He owed his longevity to his intricate knowledge of Yemen's tribal system (Clark, 2010). Saleh surrounded himself with members of his family whom he installed in prominent positions in the government and, most importantly, in the army for the purposes of co-optation and control (Longley, 2010, p. 387). The political system functioned according to the elite's short-term ability to create problems or find solutions for Saleh. Those who created problems were co-opted with money and arms, while those who solved them were rewarded in the same manner (Longley, 2010; Philips, 2011). Furthermore, a higher place in this system ensured a strong position within the Yemeni state which in turn ensured greater freedom and benefits.

The way the patronage system functions in Yemen has enabled the formation of countless alliances that have shifted over time. It also enabled Saleh's regime to intervene in conflicts, such as the one in Sa'ada or the civil war of 1994, in ways that are not possible for most states. This gave him more flexibility in choosing his actions in order to ensure the survival of the regime and, to some extent, the state. The system's fluidity generates what Sarah Philips termed 'the politics of permanent crisis', thus indicating that the recent crises in Yemen are constitutive of the system. This is evident in the shifting alliances that defined both the Sa'ada war and the Yemeni revolution, indicating the centrality of the patronage network to governing the country.

Conclusion

The failed state thesis has arguably been the main discursive element that has led key international players, like the US and the UK, to assume that the problem in Yemen is one of state failure or weakness which can be remedied through the strengthening of the state's institutions. The US government (US Department of State, 2012) has argued that there is a need for a comprehensive approach to Yemen's issues. Since the Yemeni 'government', which was until recently personified by Saleh, has been their only relatively reliable ally in the fight against AQAP, the United States has provided Yemen with funds and experts to ensure that

it is stabilised and has a more effective governance structure. However Philips (2011) argues that the US perception shows a complete lack of understanding of the practices of Yemen's 'shadow government'. She indicates that all attempts to strengthen the 'formal' institutions of the state result in the strengthening of the corrupt patronage network. Recognising the importance of this network enables one to appreciate the non-traditional functions the Yemeni state was able to provide in order to quell *and* utilise a series of crises for political ends. Blumi (2011) also demonstrates how chaos has been manufactured to take advantage of the international system's insecurity regarding terrorism in order to ensure the elite's survival through the diversion of funds ostensibly given to battle terrorist threats either created or enabled by the regime. These funds sustain the structures and character of the system. Saleh's departure from the presidency does not necessarily mean that he is no longer heading the patronage system in Yemen or that the system has collapsed. This is evident from the criticism levelled at the GCC deal for its complicity in the continuation of the system (Chatham House, 2011; Yemen Observer Staff, 2012).

This article has argued that analysing the politics of Yemen without being constrained by orientalist tropes and the Eurocentric analytical framework of the failed state thesis allows one to see the complex and fluid structure of the system and the strategies employed within it. The most important one, it is argued, is the use of intentionally produced chaos. To reach this conclusion, this article has critically analysed the structures and workings of tribalism and the network of patronage as well as the nature of the ever-changing alliances and crises faced by the regime since unification. It was thus argued that the failed state thesis's analytical usefulness is limited because it is unable to account for the dynamics shaping the Yemeni state and it therefore cannot provide adequate remedies for them.

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Notes

1 A Eurocentric view of the world is one characterised by the assumption that all that does not conform to the European way of life (society, politics, economics and culture) is a deficiency that needs to be amended.

2 In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1995) argued that the 'West' exerts ideational power over the Orient by constructing it as the inferior, feminised, sexualised and dangerous Other to its 'normal' Self. Therefore he defined orientalism as the discourse through which this knowledge is produced, expanded and disseminated.

3 Primordial denotes a state that is basic and in the earliest stage of development.

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